CIDAC 0048 TL 3458
Centro de Documentação
25. NOV. 1985

Pacific Women's Conference Sydney, June 28-30, 1985

Thankyou for this opportunity to speak to you about my country, East Timor.

We are a small people with few resources to match the power and outreach of the Indonesian Government which has over 100 embassies throughout the world backed by a huge public relations bureaucracy they call the Department of Information. We also get very little exposure in the media - first because Indonesia has sealed off East Timor to independent observers and, second, because Western countries, Australia included, place more importance on good trade and defence relations with the Suharto government than on human rights and issues of natural justice.

East Timor, as a recent article in the German magazine Der Spiegel put it, is 'a place in captivity', a prison. The East Timorese people are denied the freedom to speak for themselves. If they were free they would have travelled down to be here just as many of you have done but the reality is that not even a small army of Gillian Fishers could get them here. They depend so much, therefore, on refugees like myself and organisations like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to put their case to the world.

I make these points right at the outset to stress how important forums such as this are if we are to break the official silence of governments and get our message across. They are absolutely essential to our struggle, as vital as a guerilla ambush by our resistance in the mountains of East Timor.

Let me now share our experience with you.

For the last 500 years, with the exception of one brief period in the 1970s, East Timor's history has been one of foreign colonisation.

The Portuguese arrived in Timor about 1520 in search of sandalwood followed by the Dutch. By the turn of the 20th century the island of Timor was divided between these two powers with the Dutch administering West Timor and the Portuguese the eastern half.

As part of the Dutch East Indies West Timor was automatically incorporated into the new Republic of Indonesia in 1949. East Timor continued to be administered by Portugal until 1974 when a new Government in Lisbon chose to decolonise its overseas territories, including East Timor.

This was a momentous time for us, full of uncertainty and hope. For the first time in centuries the way was cleared for political self-determination by the East Timorese people.

It is important to note, at this point, that at no time during the preceding 29 years since 1945 did President Sukarno or the Suharto Government lay claim to East Timor, though it fought vigorously for its claim over West New Guinea, now West Irian.

In fact before 1974, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, the late Adam Malik, made several statements to the effect that if a liberation movement started in Portuguese Timor, the Indonesian Government would support it if this was the wish of the indigenous people. And after Portugal's decolonisation decision in 1974, Malik repeated this policy stating unambigously on paper the Indonesian Government's respect for the right of the East Timorese people to independence, disavowing any Indonesian intention to occupy East Timor, and pledging to respect and support 'whoever will govern East Timor in the future after independence'.

The two majority parties which emerged in 1974–5, UDT and Fretilin, favoured independence as opposed to integration to Indonesia advocated by the small Apodeti party.

In other words independence was the clear, considered choice of the East Timorese people before 1975. That is to say that resistance to integration with Indonesia is not a recent development, simply an emotional reaction brought on by the Indonesian invasion and its accompanying suffering. Timorese resistance is much deeper. It is not, therefore, something that will be overcome by belated benevolence on the part of the Indonesian government, the crude showering of material gifts in the form of new roads and public buildings.

In mid-1975, however, internal divisions and pressure from Indonesia

led to the collapse of the UDT-Fretilin coalition and a short, sharp civil war. As a result of this some 3000 Timorese died and the Portuguese administration abruptly withdrew. This upheaval and the victory over UDT by the more radical Fretilin party were used by Indonesia as the pretexts for its military invasion late in 1975.

Indonesia has sought to justify its forced takeover on several grounds.

First, flying in the face of its earlier statements of respect for East Timor's territorial integrity, it suggests that East Timor is a colonial aberration which should be 'naturally' part of Indonesia. This is nonsense. Many countries are colonial creations. The same reasoning would equally allow Indonesia to annex, for argument's sake, Papua New Guinea or the State of East Malaysia, both of which, like East Timor, share borders with Indonesia and have some cultural, historical and racial affinity with one or other of Indonesia's ethnic peoples.

Second, Indonesia suggests an independent East Timor would not be politically or economically viable, that it could only survive as part of some larger entity. The facts are that East Timor could stand on its own given regional good-will and economic support from abroad, which Indonesia itself requires. Some 30 member-states of the UN have populations of less than 1 million like East Timor.

Third, Jakarta maintains it acted for humanitarian reasons, that it had a moral responsibility to step in and pacify the warring factions and lead the country to genuine self-determination. The facts are that the invasion came several months after the end of the civil war, and at a time when East Timor was at peace and being capably administered by Fretilin. Hawkish generals forced the decision to invade, not out of concern for the Timorese but, I believe, because of their paranoia about Fretilin which to them appeared to be extremist but which, in fact, espoused a moderate set of policies common to many peoples emerging from colonialism.

They further claim that the East Timorese people exercised their right to self-determination in mid-1976 when an assembly of

selected Timorese petitioned Jakarta to incorporate East Timor as Indonesia's 27th province. This process has been universally rejected as a political joke. The UN has refused to accept its validity including the Thatcher Government, the Reagan adminstration and the Australian Government - none of whom could be regarded as the enemy of Indonesia. As in West Irian, the act of free choice in East Timor was, in reality, an 'act free of choice'.

The truth is that Indonesia's invasion has violated international law and the principles of the UN charter. For this it has been rightly condemned by the United Nations. Its so-called liberation was in fact naked aggression which resulted in wholesale and unforgiveable bloodshed and suffering. Since 1975, between 100,000 and 200,000, that is between 1 in 6 and 1 in 3 of the population, have died as a result of Indonesian military activity and associated factors such as famine. The Washington-based Center for Defense Information reported in 1983 that East Timor was one of the longest running and most violent of the 40 conflicts then raging in the world. Only in Kampuchea and possibly Afghanistan had more people died, said the Center.

Indonesia has employed a range of strategies in its attempts to subjugate East Timor and remove the issue from the agenda of the international community. I would now like to list the principal measures tried and address each one in turn.

1. War: Indonesia continues to wage war today in East Timor as part of its campaign to eliminate the guerilla resistance.

In 1976 General Benny Murdani predicted confidently it would take 3 weeks to subdue East Timor. Two years later in 1978, General Dading said it would all be over by the end of that year. But in 1981 Indonesia found it necessary to launch a fresh offensive and again in 1983. Indonesia has repeatedly asserted the Fretilin resistance has been reduced to a couple of hundred or less and was a spent force without popular support. Yet it still maintains some 10,000 troops in East Timor, backed by helicopters, tanks and OV-10 counter-insurgency jet aircraft. Church sources recently reported that Fretilin guerilla activity has intensified this year. Recently Fretilin commenced broadcasting by radio again to the outside world. This does not of itself require strength of numbers but, taken together, the evidence is clear that Fretilin is sufficientl

well-organised, supported and equipped to present a serious challenge to Indonesia even if, as it admits, it cannot win the war outright.

2. Repression: Indonesia has continually sought to intimidate the resistance by physical violence. As the head of the Catholic Church, Mgr Belo, said in July last year 'In many places there are violations of human rights, assassinations and cases of arrest and imprisonment without trial, of anyone suspected of having links with Fretilin. The families of the prisoners are in bad condition'. Amnesty International believes the pattern of human rights violations established over many years continues substantially the same in 1985. These abuses, says Amnesty, include the use of torture, disappearances and extra-judicial killings. So concerned is Amnesty that it has only this week launched an international campaign on human rights abuses in East Timor. Some 2000 prisoners are being held in corrugated iron sheds on an island off the coast of Timor, Atauro. Others are being held in prisons on mainland East Timor while others have been transferred to gaols in Java.

One of these is Dominggas da Costa. She will be 27 on August 2, and is serving a 6 year prison sentence in Tangerang prison on Java for supporting Fretilin. She was 16 when Indonesia invaded. She went to the bush with the Fretilin resistance, returned to the capital, Dili, in 1980 and with the help of a friendly Timorese administrator got work as a primary teacher. She was arrested in 1980, tried in 1984 and transferred to Tangerang last year along with her little daughter Luisa Maria Peres. Thanks to Red Cross Luisa is now back with her grandparents in Dili.

You will not be surprised to learn that women have suffered dearly because of the occupation. Violence against women has included rape, which is commonplace, widowing, prolonged separation from husbands and families, the orphaning of thousands of children, severe hunger, even death from hunger and the unspeakable anguish of seeing their children die of starvation, torture, execution and imprisonment.

A recent development is the intensification of a birth control program by the Central Government designed, unbelievably, to control what Jakarta regards as over-population in Timor where up to 30% of the people have died from war and associated factors since 1975.

3. Resettlement: Since 1979 Indonesia has resettled the bulk of the tribal people from the interior in some 400 resettlement centres, usually referred to by East Timorese as 'concentration camps'. The purpose of this measure is to control movement, and to isolate the guerilla resistance from the people. The Americans employed a similar strategy in Vietnam. Traditionally Timorese have lived in scattered extended family units and in close spiritual affinity with the land. Their concentration in centres away from their land and traditional life-style has had a shattering psychological, cultural and economic impact.

4. Development: Since 1980 in particular, Indonesia has spent large sums of money on public works in an attempt to consolidate integration, and win both international approval and the hearts and minds of the Timorese. Selected foreign visitors have been permitted to make short visits to observe the resulting material changes and many have come away singing Indonesia's praises. But there has been scant mention of Timorese attitudes. In fact they feel alienated. 'The development program has not satisfied the Timorese. It has not made them happy. They feel it is not for them, but for Indonesia', said Mgr Belo last year.

5. Indonesianisation: this involves the introduction of Indonesian transmigrants, business people and civil servants, the teaching of Indonesian language and culture in the many schools, the acculturation of the young in Indonesian universities in Java and so on. This worries the Church greatly. A strong Church statement prepared in January this year comments: 'The attempt to Indonesianise the Timorese people through powerful Pancasila campaigns, schooling and media, by divorcing the people from their own world-view, represents a slow assassination of Timorese culture. To kill their culture is to kill the people themselves'.

6. Propaganda: Jakarta campaigns energetically to convince the world that the East Timorese are happy and prospering and that resistance is minimal. Its embassies distribute glossy booklets full of colour pictures of new buildings and Timorese in traditional costume. From time to time, carefully selected delegations of MPs from countries friendly to Indonesia and journalists are permitted access. Their visits invariably last for 3 days and are accompanied by heavy ceremonial and security measures. But access such as is permitted in, for

example, the Philippines, El Salvador or South Africa, is denied. Independent observers such as Amnesty International or the Catholic Institute for International Relations in London, or the International Council of Voluntary Aid Agencies, each of whom has requested permission to visit, continue to be blocked. One can only conclude Indonesia has much to hide and wishes to avoid close scrutiny and particularly open access to the people. Access by the International Committee of the Red Cross continues to be severely restricted. The President of the ICRC, Alexandre Hay, said in Geneva in January this year that East Timor was one of the few countries where the ICRC is prevented from giving satisfactory relief to the victims of military conflict.

Taken as a whole, however, these measures have failed to crush the spirit of resistance of the East Timorese people or to allay the concern of the international community. In fact non-government expressions of concern have increased in recent times. The Vatican, the Indonesian and Portuguese Bishops and a growing number of other Church organisations have raised their voices in protest. Recently 133 members of the United States Congress, the largest number ever to sign such a letter, requested President Reagan to put East Timor on his agenda as part of a search for an 'authentic peace'. Earlier this month over 400 Parliamentarians from 13 countries called for a negotiated settlement of the conflict based on the right of the Timorese people to self-determination.

Timorese resistance to integration with Indonesia should not be measured in purely military terms. Their antipathy is also reflected in their attitude and in their faces. A West German MP who visited earlier this year as a guest of the Indonesian Government was forced to conclude, and I quote: 'The overall impression throughout the entire island is of a place in captivity. The people never smile. Here in East Timor the people look stern, bitter, hostile and numb'. That observation has been made frequently over the years. Why it should be so I think I have adequately explained. The following poem about Chile applies to Timor:

Is there resistance in Chile?
Don't look for it in the shop windows
don't expect to see it

marching down the narrow streets.
To see the resistance
listen to the hearts of the people
touch their clenched fists
read their consciences.

But perhaps the most significant non-military expression of resistance comes from the church in East Timor.

The Catholic Church, to which some 80% of the people chose to say they belonged in their responses to the Indonesian census of 1980, is 'walking with the people', to use the words of a Timorese layman. Its network of missions keeps it well-informed about events and attitudes. What it says, then, should be listened to closely for it faithfully reflects the mind of the mass of the East Timorese.

The Church's principal pastor and spokesperson, Mgr Belo, is very clear.

What we want, he is saying, are the following:

1. an end to hostilities;
2. the withdrawal of Indonesian troops;
3. respect for the culture, religion and identity of the Timorese people;
4. a non-violent, diplomatic solution based on the right of the people to self-determination;
5. negotiations between the Timorese people, including Fretilin, and Indonesia.

This last point goes to the heart of the matter.

In 1982, the UN Secretary-General, Mr Perez de Cuellar, was instructed by the United Nations General Assembly to initiate consultations with all interested parties with a view to achieving a comprehensive settlement. He has convened talks between Portugal and Indonesia. These are proceeding. But the Timorese people, the principal party to the conflict, who stand to lose or gain most by the negotiations, have not been represented at these talks, have not been consulted and, furthermore, the Secretary-General has given no commitment to

involve them, despite our United Nations recognised right to self-determination. Once again we are obliged to sit outside in the waiting room while others talk for us and about us; once again we are to be the objects of history about whom others paternalistically make decisions. This is not a recipe for success. It flies in the face of common sense and the basic rights of human beings. The Timorese will not accept a settlement negotiated behind our backs by the colonial powers. A face-saving solution of convenience may serve the political purpose of removing the issue from the international agenda but it will not bring lasting peace to East Timor any more than a similar arrangement nearly 20 years ago achieved lasting peace in West Irian.

In conclusion, I have to note, sadly, that most of your governments have voted against us at the United Nations or abstained, chosing to disregard our experience and engage in diplomacy without principles.

I believe that, with your support, we can influence the governments of the region to reconsider their position. They have not been forced to face the issue by their own people and electorates. Our case has not been fully put.

Our peoples have much in common. We share a colonial past, racial affinities, a common place in the region under the tropical sun. The difference is the East Timorese are one of the few peoples in the region to have been denied decolonisation and political self-determination. We are the exception to the general rule.

So I appeal to you for solidarity. I appeal to you to support our struggle and advocate our cause in your countries. This meeting can be the start of a whole new regional campaign spearheaded and empowered by women.

Thankyou for listening.

Emilia Pires